

**Musical Work in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project**

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**Ashely Kirby  
(Ashley Rose Smith)  
Freelance Musician  
Boise, Idaho**

**Narrator:** Ashley Kirby (Ashley Rose Smith)

**Interviewers:** Scott Farkas

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**SCOTT FARKAS 00:00:22**

Okay, this is SCOTT. I'm here interviewing Ashley Rose Smith, for the musical work in the time of COVID-19 oral history project. Thank you, Ashley, for giving some time to us today. I want to make sure that it's okay with you that we go forward with this as a recorded interview.

**ASHLEY KIRBY 00:00:43**

Yes, yeah. [you have my consent]

**SCOTT 00:00:49**

Awesome. And it is today's Saturday, May 15 [2021]. About 3:30pm. Mountain Time. And I'm in Twin Falls, Idaho and Ashley, you are in Boise, yeah?

**ASHLEY 00:00:51**

I'm in Boise, Idaho. Yeah.

**SCOTT 00:00:51**

Yeah, awesome. Okay, so let's get started. So— can you say and spell your first and last name for me?

**ASHLEY 00:00:54**

Yes, my first name is Ashley. A S H L E Y. And my performance name includes my middle name Rose R O S E. And my legal name is actually Kirby K I R B Y, but I am known commonly on the internet by my maiden name Smith. S M I T H, if that answers (*laugh*) all the identity questions.

**SCOTT** 00:01:00

Awesome. Yeah, I think we got it. [ASHLEY: Cool] And so what's your date of birth? And where were you born?

**ASHLEY** 00:01:08

My date of birth is 2/2/1987. And I was born in Logan, Utah.

**SCOTT** 00:01:22

And— what's your preferred gender, If you have any, and pronouns?

**ASHLEY** 00:01:37

Yeah—I identify as female, she, her pronouns are great.

**SCOTT** 00:01:43

What race or ethnicity, if any, do you identify with, and how important is that to your background?

**ASHLEY** 00:02:11

You know, my family history does impact me. Think I can be generalized as Caucasian. But I'm a blend of Eastern European ancestry. French. A lot of my family grew up in the French Creole region of the United States, a few generations back and Czech Swedish, Danish. A whole lot of things.

**SCOTT** 00:02:43

Lots of stuff in there. Yeah, absolutely. Do you participate in any kind of social, political, ethnic, racial, religious communities that are important to your sense of identity?

**ASHLEY** 00:02:55

Cool. That's a cool question. Um, I suppose that culturally I was raised LDS. I do not identify as a Christian, or a Mormon, any longer. I say my ethno and religious identity is closer to paganism and humanist atheist.

**SCOTT** 00:03:21

Awesome. Yeah that's great. And where do you live now?

**ASHLEY** 00:03:25

I live in Boise, Idaho.

**SCOTT** 00:03:27

Awesome. Okay, so that's kind of our demographic information that can help, you know, future researchers to understand a little context about you. And, now we'll go on to talk about some occupational stuff. So— without too much context, I'll just jump into some of these things.

00:03:46

So what is your current occupation or profession?

**ASHLEY** 00:03:51

Yeah, currently, I am self-employed as a working musician. And I function in that role primarily as a vocalist, guitarist, performer. I also work as a studio musician. And from time to time, I get to play a little bit of percussion and piano and

rhythm guitar. I also teach and study. I'm always studying ethnic dances of the world. And that's part of my musical background as well. So I kind of blend the two often. There's no dancing without music. So I'm a dance teacher, music performer, music teacher. Additionally, in the slow winter months, I also work as a medical assistant in a dermatology practice. So I've got one foot in the world of medical and mostly Creative Arts, I would say about 80% of my income comes from music.

**SCOTT** 00:04:56

Wow, that's awesome.

**ASHLEY** 00:04:56

Yeah, it is awesome (*laugh*).

**SCOTT** 00:04:57

And how long have you been on doing that, how long have you been employed that way?

**ASHLEY** 00:05:02

Yeah, so I started performing professionally when I was 18 - (17 / 18). I'm 34 now. I've been lucky to be able to sustain most of my life via music and teaching dance and performing as a professional belly dancer. Probably the last five years or so I would say that the scale started to tip to where music and dancing—was sustaining me rather than me throwing money at the process of training and exploring there. So—five years full time. But you know, it's been a slow steady burn of getting to that point for a lot of years.

**SCOTT** 00:05:49

Yeah, it sounds like maybe—15 or 20 years of kind of preparing for this arrival.

**ASHLEY** 00:05:56

Absolutely. And moving into full time for sure.

**SCOTT** 00:06:00

Wow. So how did you feel about your career at the beginning of the pandemic?

**ASHLEY** 00:06:07

Oh, gosh, yeah. You know, at the beginning of the pandemic, I have this—I have this annual ritual where I turn over my calendar, and I examine the year prior. I work with a paper calendar, I'm a bit of a grandmother, as you can see by my cable knit sweater. (*laugh*) And I look at my calendar, and I kind of examine the year prior and I compare it to the year before that. Mostly—for moments of inner personal reflection, but also monetary. There's an inescapable aspect of business, when you're working in the arts, that's, if you're clever, you will pay attention to.

**ASHLEY** 00:06:50

And at the beginning of this year, near the pandemic, I was feeling really hopeful. Everything seemed to be getting easier, and better and—all the footwork I've done in years prior connecting with venues and forming relationships with my peers, all of that was paying off and it was just getting easier. I was getting phone calls, instead of making cold calls and going to venues and trying to prove myself and getting hazed by the local good old boys, (*laugh*) you know? It was suddenly I was being recognized as a peer amongst these wonderful, wonderful musicians in my area. And, I was so humbled by that, and also feeling proud of myself, that I was making my living and supporting myself, supporting my

very old and sick dog and feeling really—the community aspect of that was really apparent to me. So, I was feeling very good; [off camera noise (*laugh*)] feeling really good about the coming year - felt like a lot of good things were coming.

**SCOTT 00:08:06**

And - I'm going to go to the next one that is on the list here. But I've— There's something I want to remember the key on here. Actually, no, I'll call an audible. So, you use the heavy word there, you use the word hazed, (*pause*) and this idea of the "good old boys" network. So—you're talking about kind of your development there and that you felt like that was a big part of getting to where you are now. Can you expand on that a little bit? Or is that, was that a big deal? Or, or what do you think? [ASHLEY: ?Inaudible?]

**ASHLEY 00:08:40**

I think that mostly—it was a series of small—but cutting deals. You know, I'm a sensitive person. And I present as female, I am female, I walk in this world as a woman. And so apart from being a musician, I experience—that sort of intersection of life. And there is a specific kind of microcosm of sexism within the music industry. You know, from moments of—you know, auditions gone bad that we're kind of doomed from the start; conversationally observing social dynamics and getting shut down in those conversations; assumptions made about my experience and intelligence, or abilities—as a woman, but also as a vocalist. There, there are more layers and intersections there too—the human voice. If you even just observe within academia, the way the human voice is trained, compared to, for example, a wind instrument, which the voice is. [a wind instrument]. And, you know, if you're a horn player, you're going to get a teacher that one on one is going to give you a set of curriculum that includes rhythm, training and scales and a lot of theory. And a vocalist gets a lot of—well we get some anatomy training, which is great, but mostly repertoire. So (*laugh*) lists of songs, caricatures, masks that you can put on, but never within my training, and I have to admit, I do not have a degree, I dipped my toe into the classical world, but I have enough knowledge to know that my peers in that world who did go full power into opera, they didn't get—they weren't sitting in practice rooms, running scales or arpeggios. You know, they weren't practicing aural skills in the way that other harmonic wind instruments get to do. And it really wasn't until really the last two years on my own seeking private tutorship that I experienced what I've always wanted, and that was to be treated like an instrument. One of my projects, Tambalka, is a set of original music that I front and I sing in a syllabic language. It's all—not scat singing, it's not improvised, it's melodies that are sung with just a human voice as if it were an instrument. And, so back to what I was saying, Jeff Baker, one of my mentors, finally sat me down and started running scales with me, you know—and doing improvisation within changes and learning about the modes. And—never have I ever—met a musician or had the opportunity to train within an academic setting, my experience is limited, obviously, where the human voice was treated like an instrument that needed that kind of training, which I think is a great disservice, and which adds to the sort of stereotypes that well, vocalist can't read music, vocalists can't improvise. And to this day, when I'm working with a band, rock band, jazz band, it doesn't matter what the setting is, if I look those players in the eye and say, I'm going to take one, just like any other player would take a solo, I really have to fight for it. I have to pause and tell them to lay back, I have to make space for myself, and that—[sigh] really gets me so frustrated, because I've worked really hard to be able to hold my own in those settings (*laugh*) you know, and it just doesn't stop. It doesn't stop, and I'm not alone in that, and I know that, that is just also a part of the jazz world. I think that people like to say, "Oh, you think, you, you think you got this?" Show us." You know, you really do have to prove yourself? Yeah,

**SCOTT 00:12:57**

But the best solo that I've heard in the last five years was a vocalist. So —

**ASHLEY 00:13:03**

oh, I've gotta know who that is. You got to send that to me.

**SCOTT** 00:13:05

I will. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Ok, good. Cool. Okay, so but it sounds like you've done a great job of or you feel like you've you feel empowered, you've done a great job of advocating for yourself, like you're alluding to here at the end over time to— like, you felt like you had maybe even begun to reach a point of arrival.

**ASHLEY** 00:13:23

Yeah

**SCOTT** 00:13:24

Where you're, you're fielding phone calls, you're in projects you care about, is that accurate? Do you think?

**ASHLEY** 00:13:29

Yes.

**SCOTT** 00:13:31

And do you still feel that way now, as we're working through the pandemic? Or has it changed a bunch? You know, throughout it?

**ASHLEY** 00:13:37

Good question. Yeah, I do feel there's—a special kind of momentum and energy in this revivalist moment. And a lot of it is like picking up where we left off. Some of it has dwindled - some connections and sort of storylines that I thought I would follow into festival season and 2020 projects, I really imagined I'd be in deep and beneficial—lucrative work that are not there and other opportunities have opened up. But it is very much positive. And it started very quickly. And yeah, the work is good, and it's frequent for me right now. I'm getting—my calendar's full. I'm really grateful. It's awesome.

**SCOTT** 00:14:25

That's awesome. Yeah.

**ASHLEY** 00:14:26

Yeah.

**SCOTT** 00:14:28

So let me ask you this then, at the beginning of the pandemic, did you have to supplement your income with some other kind of employment or other work apart from your musical work?

**ASHLEY** 00:14:41

Yes. Yeah, at the beginning of the pandemic, my performance calendar was completely wiped. Like, completely blank from March, April, May, and at that time, I still had my foot in the door from the winter season, in a medical clinic. That clinic also closed. I was teaching dance at the time. So the bottom dropped out pretty dramatically. What did I do? There were a number of, sort of grassroots—unconditional grant opportunities that I pursued. One was the Treefort Music Fund. The Treefort Music Fund supported me, probably six or seven months of the pandemic. I had a monthly stipend from them that, that was very supportive and essential to me at that time. I also live streamed a few shows. This was a really interesting aspect of receiving and asking and then connecting with community that way, we were no longer interacting face to face. And so there was this sense of disconnect, and live streaming shifted my perception of—relationship, and how someone can still be there for you. Yeah, so that's how I made ends meet: Treefort Music Fund, a little bit of live streaming, and one sort of "Wild West" venue that wanted to keep booking music throughout the whole pandemic, this

unsuspecting dive-bar. [sigh] - that that wanted - They were following the rules. But they were also culturally a little on the edge in that they were a bar but they served food, and they had live music, and I performed there conditionally. They built me this little barricade for each show. They built tables around the stage, so they had this greater than six feet amount of space around me. And they contributed to my livelihood a lot. They booked me every other week, throughout a lot of the pandemic. So that was one, one live gig I had ongoing when most of my peers would not, could not, were not working at all. So those were the pieces keeping me afloat.

**SCOTT** 00:17:25

That's really interesting. So I'm aware of the Treefort Music Festival out of Boise, but I wasn't aware of the music fund. Was that, is that always a thing? Or was that something that the festival kind of pivoted to, to support musicians through the pandemic specifically?

**ASHLEY** 00:17:40

The festival pivoted and gathered donations, opened applications to, you know, I'm not sure how broad the reach was if it was specifically for local musicians or musicians who had performed at Treefort, I'm actually not sure. But yeah, it was a response to the pandemic and kind of grassroots effort led by the festival itself. It is recently closed now that things are opening up again.

**SCOTT** 00:18:12

Wow, but what a beautiful thing to have done?

**ASHLEY** 00:18:14

I know, god bless Treefort

**SCOTT** 00:18:19

So, what was a typical working day or week like, before the pandemic for you?

**ASHLEY** 00:18:26

Yeah, so, I have ADD, so I have to work really hard to have structure in my life. Hey, what's up? Neurotypes unite! Yeah, and so I have to be really—I have to create containers for myself. So I have like designated days on which I perform certain tasks, which is essential for me as a self employed person, or else I end up just floating in a blob of non space-time. So Mondays, I spend resting because typically I'll put 2 - 3 - 4 performances in my body, and my nervous system that I need to recover from. So Monday's a rest day. Tuesdays, I like to spend writing. I sleep as late as I possibly can, and then I wake up to an empty home, and I wait for the Muse to arrive, and I write. I write a lot. I also practice on those days, Tuesdays, I spend time with my instrument, and my voice, the piano, working on skills and exploring new repertoire. Wednesdays I teach. So none of my days are typical. They're kind of like, designated per day in a seven week Gregorian sense. Thursdays, I typically start either performing Wednesday nights or Thursday nights. And, yeah, you know, those days, there's a couple hours of hair and makeup, and just like preparing for the show itself getting dressed. In between there, it depends on when I have kind of the social energy. I like to fit in two to four hours of administrative time. Which is not my favorite. So that gets put in whenever I have like the bandwidth for it that could fall on any day. Those are hours that I spend communicating to venues, arranging lesson times, and working out my finances, depositing checks, doing promotional stuff, creating Facebook events, stuff like that. Rehearsals. Rehearsals usually fall on Tuesdays or Thursdays, and during peak like summer prep time, or spring prep time, there could be anywhere from two to four rehearsals a week, depending on what kind of projects I'm doing. Yeah, and then a lot of rest. I'm actually a very introverted person. So performing for me—is an obvious paradox for my personality type. I don't really enjoy being the center of anyone's attention. So a lot of my week is spent just chilling alone, being really quiet. Rehearsing: It's very satisfying, but it is very

social. Teaching: very, very satisfying, intimate, restorative time too, but also very social. And performing itself takes a lot of energy from me. So that may not seem like a lot on paper, but it takes me a lot of time to rest and recoup. To be interesting and worthy of people's attention on stage.

**SCOTT** 00:21:51

Yeah— sometimes things that don't appear to be worth are work.

**ASHLE** 00: 21:58

For sure. Yeah. They're like, wow, your job is so fun. I'm like, Oh, my God. You wind cables for the 1,000th time in a month, and tell me how fun it is!

**SCOTT** 00:22:10

Absolutely. Absolutely. So I guess the big kind of - so we've talked a lot about the work you were doing before the pandemic, and I have like this whole list of bulleted individual questions here that kind of all of them, their point is how did all of that change? Like? Did you lose teaching engagements? Did you lose gigs? Did your workflow change? In whatever seems to be the most meaningful way to you now that we've talked about kind of what pre pandemic work life was like, how did it change during the pandemic?

**ASHLEY** 00:22:42

Oh, my gosh! It was so dramatic. Dramatic and traumatic. It was so (*pause*) shockingly altered. I mean, we all experienced that, like life just kind of stopped, like the gears were abruptly interrupted. The most impactful I think, right away for me, was losing my students. Because that was probably the most— satisfying part of my life, that interpersonal connection between mentoring and encouraging people and sharing skills and making room for others to participate, and participating together versus being central to someone's focus in that way, feels balanced and healthy for me less depleting than performing, and so that, that was gone right away. I was teaching group dance classes, and that was not safe, immediately. They just stopped. So all these darling, wonderful humans, I got to see on a weekly basis —it was gone, that structure and rhythm was gone. And I did not really account for how important that was for my social health, to have this regular thing that would pull me out of my shell and pull me out of my introversion going to class to teach— my adult students and my young students. And so the, my hobbit nature was sort of exacerbated right away, just immediate isolation. And at the same time, but unrelated, in my personal life, my home flooded, and my kitchen was filled with like black mold and asbestos and had to be remodeled and the home was not habitable. So right when lockdown happened, my home life, my physical container blew up and was not safe. Walls had to come down, remediation had to occur, and we were displaced in the middle of this pandemic: myself, my partner, and my new dog that we just adopted. So we had to find a home— right when lockdown was happening. We had no idea what was going on, so we were buying all this food. We didn't know if we'd be able to leave the house, and the guidelines weren't exactly clear at that time. So— I'm losing track of your question, in my mind, will you repeat it for me?

**SCOTT** 00:25:34

Oh, yeah, yeah. You're doing great with it by the way. (*laugh*) How did everything change? You know, how did anything or everything change during the pandemic for you, but you actually are leading right into kind of the next question, which is: Did the stay at home orders or travel restrictions impact you in any way? You were kind of heading right into that.

**ASHLEY** 00:25:58

Yeah, absolutely. It's like, stay at home. And suddenly, we're like, "Where the fuck is that? Where, excuse me, where is that." [SCOTT: You're fine.] "Where is home?" We didn't have one. And that for me personally was— So I grew up in a sort of nomadic environment, one could say. I was sort of displaced as a child. I grew up in a very impoverished home

unit, and experienced foster care. And, just the experience of displacement, and not knowing where home was, and home wasn't safe was very triggering for me on a deep, deep, deep level. So this whole experience of - and the timing, and the sudden isolation, lack of support system - ignited into this sudden, very demanding moment for introspection, like, "Why am I having such a powerful reaction to these sets of conditions? What is it about me and my inner worlds and my position in life, my stories, that is responding so strongly to being displaced, and lacking community"— Which I identify as my family, that I really didn't have as a child, but I built for myself as an adult? So there was, my days, then we're spending, reading about trauma responses and differential diagnoses that could be going on with me and my body and the sudden sort of dissociation I found myself. A lot of the hours of the day, to cope with the political climate, like so many unknowns, the way my peers were responding to this new set of conditions that we've never experienced before. And then observing the fractures that were starting to occur in my immediate social circle. And then greater (*laugh*) in the world, the sort of polarization that was occurring. I was just watching all that, as many of us were, and just having my heartbreak. You know, and just very high doses of cortisol. (*laugh*) So much stress, so much stress. But I was provided for; we did find a home and support in a couple different locations, we were really well taken care of, by our friends, and eventually got to be back home, and that was such a relief. But, you know, my days were spent (*pause*) coping. That was really it. I had no work. I had no one to teach. I had no structure, you know? And my ADD brain was like, "I don't know what to do with myself." So yeah, I rested. I spiraled. I (*pause*) went to therapy, where I found out I do have PTSD, and was triggered by this environment. And another of other things I'm still investigating about myself. Bu, so the last year, yeah, it went from action to like slowing down. It went from externally engaging with my community to really going deep inward out of necessity. I didn't want to do that. It was really painful. But it had to happen in order to learn how to cope in a more healthy way. For sure.

**SCOTT** 00:29:43

Yeah. And you know, it seems to me just kind of an as an outside observer, I follow your bands on social media and follow you obviously, and things like that, and it seems to me that— the narrative I was seeing from the outside was that your musical community kind of was picking you up and supporting you they maybe some of those opportunities for places to live and things like that were showing up for you. Is that accurate or?

**ASHLEY** 00:30:10

Yeah, man, I have so many angels in my life. I was totally supported and it was shocking and (*pause*) shocking and brought up like the the need to sort of get over, like survival guilt or imposter syndrome or white guilt or just (*pause*) social guilt. I recognize how much social clout I have in my community. If I ask for something, I feel like—I'll be provided for. And so, I was very cautious about what I would ask for because I felt like I had this social (*pause, sigh*) I wanted to use it not just for me. And so there were a number of live streams, after observing PLEASE [?program?] and the sort of amazing mutual aid movement that was occurring at that time, where I did my best to sort of field some of that. I guess I don't know if there's another word for power, for that social power that I was holding where I recognized: "oh, I do have people who are observing my social media." They're observing what's going on in my life, and they're participating. Some other people probably need some of that observation, so there were, there were a number of families that were sponsored —in a number of the live streams that I got to do. And I mean, like, people were just pouring out their wallets. We made so much money for some of these families, and it felt so good for me, because it was tough moving from collaborative experiences to very self centered, individualist pursuit. You couldn't - I couldn't live stream with my friends, and be following the guidelines. I couldn't perform live with a group. I was singing solo, I was streaming solo. So that felt really good to observe like other people who were in movements and like, we need to share resources. And thinking, "Oh, one of my resources, I don't have a lot of money, but I have some social resources. My community is my greatest resource with people." So that was a really cool discovery that I don't think I would have made, had I not witnessed the need. And it was me discovering how easy it was for me to meet my needs that I was like, "Oh, yeah, I need to get some people in on this. This is great. It's great." People really wanted to support each other. You know, we all

experienced this in different ways. And closer to the bottom, hit bottom a lot faster [than people with] an economic cushion - so that was all really interesting, and mostly heartwarming.

**SCOTT** 00:33:20

It sounds to me like this is I mean, it ties right in with that very first reflection you made, which was, well, you've done all this work over years and years to get to a place where you've got this network and this community and it's kind of the arrival point of lots of work that got you to that position. And what a lovely thing that you use that to help others. So okay, it sounds like,— some of the things that you're most used to doing in terms of musical work, they all of a sudden weren't options, but you were finding ways to do other things. So in your mind, are there new skills or anything like that that you've picked up? I'm still here. Are you frozen? We might be—[ASHLEY:?inaudible?] I can hear you a little bit.

**ASHLEY** 00:34:20

Will you repeat...

**SCOTT** 00:34:22

Yeah, your video is still frozen. I can hear you in and out. Are you getting me okay? There we go. You're back.

**ASHLEY** 00:34:34

All right. Cool!

**SCOTT** 00:34:35

Awesome, how exciting!

**ASHLEY** 00:34:38

I missed the last question.

**SCOTT** 00:34:39

Yeah yeah, I'm with you, We'll pick up right there. So, it sounds to me like you're, you know, now you're in this pandemic environment. You're used to playing with bands and all of a sudden that's not an option. You're doing some live streaming and some other things. Musically or otherwise, do you think there were other skills that you've deepened because of the pandemic. Or that you've picked up or learned because of the pandemic?

**ASHLEY** 00:35:11

Yeah, yes, Definitely. (*pause*) And mostly ones that I still need to work on. (*laugh*) Live Streaming is still really difficult for me. I'm not a very technologically minded person. Being on camera is not typically in my wheelhouse, either. Um, (*sigh*) yeah, so much more of life has been online lately, and so I have had to kind of expand my capacity to do that. So many more hours have been spent either coordinating on social media, or fundraising on social media, or just participating in community on social media. So I guess that sort of whatever— social emotional muscle that gets flexed for that capacity, recognizing that's just a really big part of our world. If I want to get lessons, if I want to learn, if I want to study, I have to become a learner that can do that on video. So that's one thing I had to do. I took the number of songwriting workshops over the pandemic, and I was really, you know, kind of pooh-poohing the idea of not having that immediacy, and that warmth that comes with real life human connection. And I had to kind of get over that idea that I couldn't connect really, truly with someone if it wasn't in person. So my mind has shifted around that idea and accepted it. It's been great actually, and there are relationships that I have learned can be sustained via video chat in a way that is much more rich and personal, personable than it was, you know, just watching them float in the ethers online. You know, I made a lot more FaceTime video calls to family members and old friends. So I learned— I learned how to socialize differently. Yeah,

and we kind of touched on the mental health aspect learning a deeper level of self care, and affording myself moments of stumbling in recovery. All of that was a deep, big learning experience.

**SCOTT** 00:37:39

Was music a part of that for you? Did you find that you were using music to support your spirit or other people's or to lift people's spirits or anything like that?

**ASHLEY** 00:37:50

Totally. So many of the song fragments that are getting expanded now that I feel I have the capacity to go into editor's mind, were from moments of just singing to myself, like I did when I first learned guitar. When I first picked up guitar was never with the aim to perform or share with anyone, it was really this introspective way of almost holding myself and feeling my own self and experiences reflected and reverberated back to me. Yeah, so definitely, it was related to music. I wouldn't say I really sharpened a whole lot of my skills. You know, I was in survival mode. And so I don't think the brain really truly learns that well, in that state of mind. But I definitely maybe reconnected to a part of myself that sings and plays as a mode of self soothing, for sure.

**SCOTT** 00:38:55

Yeah. And it sounds like you did do some investment, you know, in terms of some classes and things. And so it's interesting to me to hear that and to hear the conversation about, you know, "Some bits of musical inspiration showed up, but I didn't have the focus to expand it just yet." So I'm curious, did you have motivation to practice? Did you have motivation to stay really engaged? Or did you find that was really difficult or anything like that?

**ASHLEY** 00:39:25

It was definitely really difficult. I was having such a powerful response to the changes in my environment that it almost wasn't even on my radar, to, you know, go "Oh, gosh, I have so much free time now. I'm going to learn that set of changes that I've always struggled with, or I'm finally going to learn my scales on guitar." That was like not even within the realm of possible for me. I did not realize what I was experiencing was a trauma response. I didn't realize how disassociated I was for months - for months of that year. And there was also nothing outside of myself pulling me into action. Another way I support myself having in a-typical mind is that I have to put landmarks outside of myself like a gig, or a rehearsal, a special novel performance, learning a new set of music to pull myself into action in a focused way. And I didn't have any of that. I didn't have any upcoming things. I didn't have any potential projects. And I know that I could have, but I had these self limiting beliefs about how that could be done over the internet, and a number of things that kept me really from using that opportunity to sharpen my skills, as I know many people did. And I'm not letting the idea enter my mind, that was a waste. I didn't really have a choice. That was not something I chose. It was a response, I didn't really have any control over. It's funny how trauma works.

**SCOTT** 00:41:14

You were living.

**ASHLEY** 00:41:16

Yeah! Yeah, I was living. I was surviving and coping and living in a newer type of inter-personal relationship with my partnership. So music, I lost any kind of really, truly forward momentum up until the end of the pandemic— End? Right? "End." - in quotes — once I started to feel like there was a possibility, things could shift, when the vaccine started rolling out, when I got good treatment for my PTSD, and I felt like it was emerging and rubbing my eyes and the clouds were kind of lifting I was like "Oh Life! Life might be coming back." This instinct to work again kicked in. And this instinct to create, and plan, and— be supported and my creative process kicked in. So I've applied for grants to record a record this

year, and I've been writing that record, and I've been fronting a band led by me playing my music that I've curated, and that I'm writing for the first time in a long time. And that, all has come with the support of this revivalist energy where people are so—thrilled to get to hear music again. But that energy and that clarity, and that life didn't come back to me until maybe three months ago. Three or four months ago. So I lost a whole year. Pretty much.

**SCOTT** 00:42:50

Sure, sure. [ASHLEY: *(laugh)*] Well, but this is interesting, though. So I know—I think the band you're talking about is you and your partner in that band together?

**ASHLEY** 00:43:03

Oh, no, actually.

**SCOTT** 00:43:04

Oh, this is a different band?

**ASHLEY** 00:43:05

It is. Yeah. Yeah. So it's tentatively placeholder name is "The Ashley Rose Band" or "Ashley Rose and Honey Bearers" (*two syllables*), bearing the sweet honey groove of vintage soul and r&b. But there is another project that is booked for some upcoming festival called Tambalka. And I do play in that with my partner Esteban, yeah.

**SCOTT** 00:43:32

So I'm just curious, you're talking about getting these things up and running, again, kind of the motivation of it, the grants that you've been writing, to make that happen, it sounds like a really active process. So, I guess the first question I've got is how you have instigated that, like, what grants have you been looking at? What, what pulled you towards them and how it sounds like you're the instigating figure in a lot of it. So how did you manage that?

**ASHLEY** 00:43:58

Yeah, well, you know, I have to say that I am showing up for it now. But the instigators have really been the people in my community who've served supportive roles, and have watched me kind of hold back that willingness to record and produce a solo project. A number of men in my community who said: 'Hey, we've got, we've got money and you've got a voice, and look, there's a recording studio. Why don't you go to this recording studio and record your original music?' and me going, 'Oh, I don't know about that idea.' You know, for years, actually, for them giving me this nudge, like 'When are you going to be ready? You're great. We'll, we'll produce it. What do you need?' you know, and that shy, introversion nature really has been getting in the way. So it was not instigated by me. I finally was like "god-damn, I lost the whole year without my choice. Why would I choose to do that to myself? To not participate fully with my talents and my skills that I've acquired over a lifetime?" And a community that's asking for something to hold, you know, I play so many shows every year, where people are asking, 'Where can I listen to you and you're not around? Can I take your CD home?' And I don't have that, I don't have a recorded work of music. I am in the studio a lot recording other people's music, and I love playing that supportive role. I don't have my own work of songs, except a very few select underground demos from bands in college. That's really it. So I'm responding to that. So I have applied for the Alexa Rose grant, which I hope to hear back from this year, we'll see what happens. And there are a number of other opportunities that I'll get to speak about when I know for sure what's going on there with people who might be willing and interested to support me recording a record of my own music. So we'll see.

**SCOTT** 00:45:44

That's awesome. Good luck with that.

**ASHLEY** 00:46:20

Thanks so much.

**SCOTT** 00:46:21

So, okay, the other piece I'm curious about, though, is diving back in. You know, we've lived so long with distancing and masks and not being in the same place. And now we're talking about live shows and singing together and playing together. Has there been any kind of friction with you and your collaborating musicians, as you've navigated diving back in? And what's that kind of been like?

**ASHLEY** 00:46:46

Hmm... Friction? You know, I think the most complicated— aspect of this is, "Is our community ready?" The friction I experience is me performing— you're either literally or sort of asking people to gather so all this time I was performing this bi-weekly gig, this friction existed, and it's still there, to some degree. Lesser now that most of the musicians I'm asking to perform with are vaccinated. But in the initial point of going "Oh, maybe we could do this." There was some moral discussion of "Should we do this?" Should we actually play that festival? Is it going to be safe by then? We don't know. So the friction was like this. Like, "Are we bad people? If we go and play music and ask people to show up in the big group and dance?" I never thought I'd asked myself that question. But now, ironically, the hardest part is that all the musicians I want to play with are in very high demand, and so there's scheduling conflicts. Everybody's like, 'Yes, let's do this.' And there's so much work all of a sudden! so much work, for everybody! But for this little sub hub of musicians I love to work with, they're in high demand. And so that's, that's kind of it. Otherwise, we're totally in joy to be together again. I mean, like it's absolute bliss, to get to play music with these people. It's amazing. I can't think of a conflict except scheduling. That's it. (*laugh*)

**SCOTT** 00:47:13

Alright. I like that. A couple of kind of practical-ish questions here. Are you now or have you been a member of a union?

**ASHLEY** 00:48:51

No. I mean, no, not in a strict sense. I've, I've never paid dues. And I've never signed anything. I have always had in my heart a sort of, even before I was getting paid what a professional in this area was and should be paid, always was very cautious of undercutting my peers, taking work that was not mine, or that I wasn't ready for and sort of the unspoken rules of a community that to my knowledge, hasn't had a union for a long time. Recently, there was an email chain going around and I won't speak about the details of who and what because I haven't dived deep within it. But there were a set of guidelines that were sent out to the music community recently, speaking to rate and conditions that should be expected and upheld amongst working professionals. And so in that way, anytime I have the opportunity to speak to someone up and coming, that once was me that never had this conversation, no one told me how it was done or should be done, I try to say like when you know, you're getting to this point, this is kind of how to avoid undercutting your peers, how to uphold the perception of value for live music and professional musicianship, and professionalism and the art of entertaining people. So never formally, but I do very much ethically, sort of embody feeling unionized with my community. And I think that that echoes amongst a lot of the working musicians in this area. And they taught me that subtly, even if they never gave me the gift of that conversation. I do try to watch closely and take note.

**SCOTT** 00:50:57

And it sounds like, let me know if I'm perceiving this accurately. It sounds like maybe you have at least the belief that there hasn't been an opportunity in your career in this area to join a union, like it's just not an option. But there's some of that same kind of community, camaraderie, spirit that we might associate with unionization. Anyway, is that accurate?

**ASHLEY** 00:51:22

Yeah, that is somewhat true. The email I was alluding to earlier, had the word union on it. And, I just, I don't know if it paused during the pandemic, or exactly where it's moved through or who's supporting that existing, or what the pathways are to making it official. But there is something out there and the conversation has been getting louder and more prominent amongst people who are unhappy about the pay that we're getting here in this area. The undercutting that does take place, venues and promoters and sound people who are absorbing the—the economy that is there for entertainment and skipping over the talent that's putting it on. These conversations are happening. There is talk of a union. I don't know where it's at right now. But I'm definitely interested. Yeah.

**SCOTT** 00:52:19

Awesome. So at this point, I'm trying to pick the last, you know, because I want to be sensitive to your time here. So I'm trying to pay [ASHLEY: I'm good on time, so you do you. Yeah.] the last couple of great questions. So um, this is kind of a section of reflection, reflecting kind of questions here. Are there any aspects of the different kinds of work you had to do during the pandemic that you think are improvements on the work you were doing before the pandemic?

**ASHLEY** 00:52:51

(Pause) Yeah, you know, all of the work I did, on studying my nervous system is paying off in a big way now. The body I lived in a year ago or two years ago, would not have been able to accept a booking of seven or eight performances in a week. I wouldn't have known how to cope with that level of stimulus, and triggering experiences that happen in my body with my history and my neuro type. So in that way, that work is paying off big time because I feel more resilient now. I have a deeper level of understanding of my body and my nervous system. I have a more rhythmic and intentional practice of self care and restoring myself after experiences like that. So my capacity to do beneficial work has definitely grown. Though a lot of the year, if you just looked at it from a bird's eye view, it just looked like stagnancy. Once I got to work and did the work of healing, it was so beneficial. It was so beneficial for me. Yeah.

**SCOTT** 00:54:22

I'm muted now.

**ASHLEY** 00:54:24

Oh, you're frozen.

**SCOTT** 00:54:26

Oh, no, I can still hear you. And you're back

**ASHLEY** 00:54:30

Oh I can hear you, and your back.

**SCOTT** 00:54:34

Okay, good. Okay, great news. So, this is kind of like a two part question, which is, what role do you think, musical work, kind of especially your musical work, plays in society? And do you think that'll change post pandemic?

**ASHLEY** 00:54:54

Post pandemic? You know, I had a deeper sense of recognition for the emotional impact of live music and the act of singing to someone, and how important that is for everyone, to regulate their sense of well-being. I gained a deeper understanding of that, and I think that everyone did. In the conversations I'm having with my peers, my friends, my

people, my quaran-team, music was a fixture in their life that was utilized almost every day to alter their mind state, and their mindset, almost every day. And the feedback I got via my live streams was how this was like the highlight of their day to hear someone sing to them. You know, and I think about the act of mothers singing lullabies to their children, and that culturally, music is always an act of making someone feel something but usually feel better. And I think that when, —when I, — The first few performances I had out where I saw the elders in our community coming out again, and listening to music. And I had this strange, strange sense of like, wow, I haven't seen a person in their 60s, in their 70s, in their 80s at a live music performance in such a long time. This is so strange. And I would watch these people as they would watch me sing, and the emotional responses that were happening were very powerful. People were weeping in the middle of restaurants. You know, and we were covering Dusty Springfield (*laugh*) this like a jukebox restaurant gig, you're like playing in the background, and people were really moved by it. I don't know what will happen post pandemic, but I don't think I will appreciate my sense of what a privilege it is to hear and to sing music in person. So I guess I hope that that doesn't change. I hope that people continue to have this deep sense of generosity towards musicians, and this deep sense of appreciation for artists, performing artists of all kinds, because I see that now. I see that people are - they're overwhelmed with how grateful they are to get to experience this again after noting that this is not a given in life. Who would have thought? That's what I'd hoped. The hope continues. Yeah.

**SCOTT** 00:54:56

I like that. "It's not a given." Man, you're doing such a great job of touching on every question that I have here. Let's do like a lightning round.

**ASHLEY** 00:56:55

Sure

**SCOTT** 00:56:55

Of like really practical pandemic questions. How does that sound?

**ASHLEY** 00:57:06

Sure, let's do it.

**SCOTT** 00:57:08

OK, so, did you ever get sick or know anyone who did?

**ASHLEY** 00:58:11

Yes, I got sick in November. I contracted COVID at the venue I was performing in.

**SCOTT** 00:58:16

Oh. Okay, what was that like?

**ASHLEY** 00:58:19

Yep. I felt like I got what I deserved, honestly, because I was afraid of that happening. I knew if I was going to get it, that was where I would get it, and I did, and thank God, I recovered fully after some months. But yeah, I did experience COVID. Fairly mild case.

**SCOTT** 00:58:40

And were you ever quarantined? During the pandemic?

**ASHLEY** 00:58:44

Yes. There were two or three times minus the lockdown, where I quarantined voluntarily due to an exposure, or a friend who'd been exposed within the very small group of people I'd seen at the time. Yeah.

**SCOTT** 00:59:03

Okay, do you feel like your access to technology has been sufficient to get you through the pandemic period?

**ASHLEY** 00:59:13

Yeah, yeah, I'd say so. Like, I could ask for more ZOOM capabilities or more TWITCH [An interactive livestreaming service for content spanning gaming, entertainment, sports, music, and more] capabilities. I still haven't climbed that mountain. That's, that's still in the future. But generally, yes, I've had the internet. I've had my computer, my phone. Yeah.

**SCOTT** 00:59:36

Un-mute. Okay. Has the pandemic changed your social life?

**ASHLEY** 00:59:44

Yes, yes, it has. Yep. It definitely has. Mm-hmm, it really has! I think a lot of my life was spent pretending like I really could survive as an extroverted person, on a regular basis. But the fact of the matter is, I do so much better with a very tight knit small, small group of 'nesties' of people that I'm really bonded to, and protecting the rest of my energy with people that I interact with, not on a superficial level, but they're just not in there. Yeah, that's just kind of how I am. And I think I've had to accept that as I've had more opportunities to socialize in groups. It's just really not for me if I'm being totally honest.

**SCOTT** 01:00:42

It's almost a paradox, isn't it? Where we're like, well, we're coming out.

**ASHLEY** 01:00:46

Yes! Totally! Oh totally, and it might just be this hump of being completely out of practice socially. So we'll see how that goes. Might be early to tell.

**SCOTT** 01:00:58

So do you, your family or your social circle, wear masks or practice social distancing or other safety strategies?

**ASHLEY** 01:01:08

Yeah, a lot of the people I am seeing, we still chat from a distance. But more and more folks that are in my life are vaccinated and are not wearing masks. We're hugging. My, my pod, my little quaran-team of four or five people that I spent the year with, they're all vaccinated so there's a sense of somewhat normalcy amongst us immediately. And then, very slowly, it seems that the people in my circle are mostly getting vaccinated and we feel safe to hang out and breathe the same air. It's great.

**SCOTT** 01:01:49

That's an amazing thing, isn't it? Okay, so the last thing I want to do is to leave a space here. In case there's any other thoughts you want to add? Or if there's anything that you were hoping we would get to that we didn't or any other reflections you've got or anything like that?

**ASHLEY** 01:02:08

I don't know. I feel like we went pretty deep. And you asked some really great questions. And you left a lot of space for me to expand (*laugh*) on them. I really don't. I don't know that I have much to add at all. Yeah, that was nice to reflect though. I appreciate you reaching out to me and offering this time to have a conversation about it all. That's been really cool.

**SCOTT** 01:02:34

Yeah, it's, I think, been pretty excellent. I've certainly, - it's interesting to me, because I think I've been pretty aware of you, musically from a musical work standpoint, throughout the pandemic. I mean, we've talked a bunch back and forth, and I've seen your stuff, but I've learned a lot that I was not aware of by talking to you just now. So yeah.

**ASHLEY** 01:02:56

Cool. Thanks for listening, Scott.

**SCOTT** 01:02:59

Okay, so, um, I'm gonna, I guess then we were kind of at the end, I'll turn off the recording but I have one or two other questions for you after I turn it off. So we'll be cool there, don't just sign off right away and wrap up sound good?